

Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice
**A National Conference Call to Discuss the Evaluation of
Interagency Environmental Justice Projects**

1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington DC
EPA Headquarters, Ariel Rios Building, Room 7216
Call-in number:(202) 260-1015, Access code, 2770#

FINAL CONFERENCE CALL NOTES

Wednesday, April 4

3:00-3:25 p.m. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Jerry Filbin, EPA, facilitator

3:25-3:35 p.m. BACKGROUND & GOALS OF CONFERENCE CALL

Charles Lee, EPA

- What are Interagency EJ Projects?
- Why evaluate Interagency EJ Projects?
- What are the goals of this meeting?

Charles

Want to begin conversation about exciting process. Two years we set out to reinvigorate the IWG. We developed an EJ Action Agenda focusing on communities –seeking to address community issues in a holistic manner. A key component of this approach was the development of partnerships that involved all stakeholders. IWG sought to test this approach through Action Agenda projects initiated in May 2000. Over the past several months this collaborative model has been used.

Through this effort that we're focused on today we want to continue developing a framework by which we can evaluate these. We'd like to derive lessons from them and use these lessons to form a platform for doing business.

OPEI spearheaded this process on behalf of the IWG. We're still very early in on the process. We need a common set of parameters by which to judge these project. An important question is "success by who's perspective?" We would like to develop a concept for success that people can buy into. Collaborative model for achieving environmental justice is not applicable for each situation, but we believe it's applicable in a majority of situations, particularly for leveraging resources.

Questions and comments?

3:35-4:05 p.m. EVALUATION GUIDING PRINCIPLES (see attachment 1)

Presentation of Guiding Principles -Katherine Dawes, EPA
Discussion -Jerry Filbin

- How appropriate are these principles?
- What things seem unclear about the principles as they are presented?
- What additional principles could be useful?

Katherine

Reason for guiding principles. As we talk to EJ folks, we wanted to be clear about what we're doing and our operating principles. These principles serve as an entree for talking about evaluating these projects. EJ project evaluation must focus on all stakeholders involved. Need guiding principles to help guide evaluation process.

Abe Wandersman

Principles are excellent.

Rick Minard

Two points: (1) Keep information private. This is important. Some things are inappropriate to release to public. To get to the truth may have to protect confidence of interviewee and keep certain information private. (2) Ideally evaluation should be happening all the time and built into the project. It should be continuous and where possible quantitative.

Larry Charles

There should be involvement of community people in the evaluation. Two points: (1) Evaluation process must not be cumbersome. Minimize the complexity of the evaluation and the time needed to participate in the evaluation. In addition, the evaluation activities should take place in a forum that is not intimidating. (2) Most important product resulting from these projects may not be something physical –how do you measure increased involvement? How do you measure increased community empowerment. Recognize the value of those things that are hard to measure.

Cynthia Peurifoy

Must define goals up front. Everyone must agree to the same goals in the evaluation process.

Molly Singer

Distinguish between subjective and objective condition of EJ projects. Some stakeholders want to see quantitative numbers; others see value in other things. Consult stakeholders before you begin. Ask local participants how they're measuring success.

Torri Estrada

Good principles in general but need more. Think about evaluation at the beginning of these projects. To do a more participatory evaluation need good facilitation, broader public involvement, and a capacity building component. Also, principle to add: Be thoughtful about research and data gathering. The data gathering techniques should be acceptable to the local folks.

Larry Charles

Two additional components should be focused on in goals: (1) Extent to which the project contributes to greater community empowerment; and (2) Extent to which project promotes community-based environmental protection.

Abe Wandersman

How far along are you in these projects?

Charles Lee

Fifteen projects were selected last year. Some projects were some new, some were augmented. This IWG approach to these projects included goals that were relatively general. Pulled projects together without focus on evaluation. We're looking at this now and as we move forward. We want to incorporate evaluation components into future projects.

The purpose of this evaluation effort is to develop an evaluation framework and develop methodologies that will be refined over time ultimately to get to a more refined collaborative model.

There is a wide mix of projects. Both process and organizational issues are involved. Part of this evaluation process also is just getting to know the projects and the people (see The Deliberative Practitioner).

We're looking at the projects that will provide us information that can serve as a template to help us understand what a successful project would look like.

Torri Estrada

I would like to clarify the issue of capacity building in the evaluation context. With some stakeholders you bring together folks with differing levels of experience with evaluation. How do you get these folks on a level playing field.

In regards to the use of facilitation- to require people to sit down for an entire evaluation process and keep those folks together requires people skills. More than a technical evaluation person, but a project person is needed – someone who can play the facilitator role.

Molly Singer

What's the function of the evaluation? I'm assuming you're not going to be evaluating each project since they are at different stages. Are you just going to do a snapshot? For the evaluator the goals of the evaluation may be to understand the thoughts of the public. The ultimate goal of the federal partners may be to use this evaluation to best learn how we can modify our policy to help community. Also, some communities may not be ready for an evaluation.

Luisa Pessoa-Brandao

Evaluation can also focus on building capacity. For example, you can look at the evaluator as more of a trainer responsible for training community members on how to do focus groups. Also, sometimes need to be inventive in how you collect data. For example, in documenting experiences of youth projects can encourage them to do a group performance describing the project.

4:05-4:10 p.m. BREAK

4:10-4:20 p.m. RECAP & INTRODUCTIONS OF NEW PARTICIPANTS
Jerry Filbin, EPA, facilitator

Katherine

Wrap-up so far-

*Rick Minard suggests that we need to protect confidences. There are instances where the evaluator must make choices about privacy.

*Larry Charles suggested that the evaluation shouldn't be too cumbersome and that evaluation issues should not be left out.

*Cynthia suggested that it's important to have well-defined goals.

*Molly suggested that it's important to have a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures. Also, be ready to ask stakeholders how they're measuring success.

*Torri mentioned that 1) it's difficult to strike the balance between a standard and a more participatory evaluation; 2) these projects can really be different from one to the next; and 3) these evaluation efforts should involve some form of capacity building.

*Larry mentioned that it's important to consider the extent to which these projects foster community empowerment and community-based environmental protection.

*Molly also suggested it's important to capture the changing conditions (???)

*Luisa suggested that we shouldn't be tied to traditional data gathering techniques

*Torri also suggested that it's important to build capacity for all stakeholders involved in the evaluation, including government officials

4:20-4:50 p.m.

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK (see attachment 2)

Presentation of Framework -Katherine Dawes

Discussion -Jerry Filbin

-How could this evaluation framework be improved or made more useful?

-Are these the appropriate questions - if not, what additional questions or changes to these questions might be required?

-What are some strategies for finding common themes in diverse projects?

Katherine

Goals of the evaluation to help key decision makers better understand interagency approach as a tool and understand what makes the projects readily transferable. We haven't pinned down exactly how we'll move ahead.

We'll use a combination of data gathering techniques, but we are constrained by the Paperwork Reduction Act, meaning that we cannot interview more than nine non-federal persons for each project.

There will be more general questions that we can ask of each project, but there will also be project-specific questions. Another set of questions will be directed at the federal family (e.g., what policies or programs may have prohibited your agency from providing the resources or services to the community?)

After looking individual projects, we hope to develop a set of cross-cutting lessons learned

Molly Singer

Will EPA do the evaluation?

Katherine

yes

Quentin Pair

Project coordinators are not worried about EPA. In this instance it's a good idea to have EPA take the lead on this.

Carol Leftwich

Is it possible to involve other agencies?

Charles Lee

Bigger team? Will people be more open -different perspective/part of methodology is it an evaluation in partnerships. There are some very contentious issues here. Coming to a common agreement of what constitutes success difficult, more challenging in EJ. (???)

Molly Singer

Inexperienced evaluation (???)

Kate McGlooin

Appreciate Charles' concern. Maybe neutral facilitator. Lend greater sense of longer term credibility.

Danny Gogal

Develop a "who are you" to show that it's not a program person would be helpful (e.g., a short biography of each of the evaluators). Appointing one community person and having that person help develop. This will ensure that when the evaluation actually gets underway it won't be the first time community folks have actually heard about the evaluation. The "Custom fit to the scope" principle is important.

Quentin Pair

I want to provide some explanation. OEPI's role is somewhat removed. This should be explained up front.

Torri Estrada

Question about how projects are set up.

Charles Lee

The project goals are agreed upon up-front. The number of partners increases over time and these projects are pretty dynamic. Partners may stay on board or increase, but the goals of these projects can evolve.

Sue Ellen Keiner

Need to have clear goals of project being evaluated, but the evaluator needs to understand how goals may have changed.

Larry Charles

Need to show some flexibility this time around on the evaluations

Charles Lee

In our vision, we want to ID a template that says if your confronted with an EJ problem, this is one way to move forward. We want to be able to say this is what the elements and components of

success are.

Larry Charles

Point that sells itself. There are many different issues in quest for justice (e.g., protecting public health, providing jobs, etc.). These evaluations should be evaluating all components. Must recognize this and not penalize those communities that try certain things that may not work out (to ensure that these groups won't be hurt politically).

Danny Gogal

In doing the evaluation, this isn't so much an evaluation of projects, instead of evaluating a process. List communities evaluated, but don't cite them directly.

Molly Singer

I think one evaluation per project (with chapter on IWG)

Katherine Dawes

What is the best approach for evaluation here?

Quentin Pair

The focus should be...does the collaborative process work and why (end result-process, but both process and project description fit hand and glove.

Michelle Roberts

Need to look at projects, but don't emphasize particular projects, but look at processes as well – look at hand and glove, but don't fully emphasize each project.

Quentin Pair

I assume there would be an evaluation for each project selected and one chapter on general issues.

Larry Charles

We have done some things in Hartford that have not been considered by other communities, but other communities should know about these efforts. They need to know what are some of the hurdles and approaches used to overcome these issues. It's important to produce a thoughtful document of things that didn't go as well.

Danny Gogal

The evaluation should address what challenges these projects have faced and how they've overcome them.

Molly Singer

The chapters of the book could be issued around different themes (e.g., public health, economic development, etc.) so that different parts would have appeal for different groups.

Torri Estrada

There is a tension between how one project may be applicable. Need adequate contact for each project. It's important to document the richness of each individual project.

Quentin Pair

Back to Molly's issues. The central theme should be evaluate the collaborative processes. How do we capture all projects? But at the end, the focus should be on the collaborative process.

Molly Singer

Who is this evaluation really for? All these EJ projects what's in it for different groups. For instance, local governments may see transportation theme and say yes, this evaluation can work for me.

Charles Lee

What do you mean by interagency/intra-agency approach in a community setting? This is a much different issue than simply cross-agency approaches. Is there in fact, in these fifteen projects an emergence of a model. And, if in fact there is a model, what are components of these models.

John Byrne

Collaborative process + substantive contributions of each of these projects. You can look at both. What was set of processes that linked stakeholders that was constructive. Ultimately you could develop a template for collaboration and a template for substantive results.

Sue Ellen Keiner

Some folks may be confused by the thought of the evaluation of an interagency approach. May be helpful to ask interviewees what are they making comparisons to when they talk about the interagency approach.

Larry Charles

Don't have to worry about community evaluating interagency projects. Will be a challenge to interact with folks to judge federal agencies. The evaluation will be a learning experience for both federal agencies and communities. We trust the government doing the evaluation.

Sue Ellen Keiner

Explain up-front that this evaluation is for learning on both sides.

4:50-5:10 p.m.

FINDING THE FIRST PROJECTS FOR EVALUATION (see attachment 3)

Background on project selection -Charles Lee

Discussion -Jerry Filbin

-How should we choose which projects to evaluate?

Charles Lee

What do you think should be criteria for project selection? Not every project can be evaluated. Ultimately hope projects can do self-evaluations. We expect to evaluate three to five projects, with interviews starting in July and August. There are key things to keep in mind for project selection.

Danny Gogal

I have a question about the audience. Who are we reporting to? ID success and report to community. Another is -is the IWG approach good? Report to government. What are we trying to find out?

Larry Charles

Look at extent to which collaboration exists on both sides of the table (government level / community level). Choose a project with a maximum number of partners and choose a project with a minimum number of partners. Then look at urban vs. rural/tribal.

Carol Leftwich

Consider (1) what extent EJ is a positive for federal agencies (??); (2) what extent the issue is a priority (for community and state agency); and (3) what extent to resources are directed to the projects.

Molly Singer

Focus on projects that are further along

Charles Lee

Sometimes there's a honeymoon period and then a problem develops

John Byrne

If this is a process evaluation, better to select projects that are further along

Danny Gogal

Duration is more important than whether they meet their objectives

Sue Ellen Keiner

Concerned about ability to ensure criteria of geographic diversity since so many may not be far enough along

Charles Lee

If you think more is better, we'll work hard to get more done

Larry Charles

Lots at stake here. Some consider EJ as part of the problem instead of part of the solution to redevelopment. The more resources we can put into this the more effective this will be in terms of educating people about the value of EJ.

John Byrne

You should try to get more than three or four for a process evaluation.

5:10-5:25 p.m.

COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS

Discussion -Jerry Filbin

-How should results be communicated?

-What are the best outreach strategies to ensure that results find those

who

could most benefit from them?

Jerry Filbin

Who is our audience hear and what do you want to communicate?

There are number of possible audience and so who do we want to communicate to?

Larry Charles

Congress is an audience here and cabinet level officials. These projects could lend some to the discussion on EJ.

Dorothy Morrison

From local government perspective, local governments should be educated on collaborative effort.

Sue Ellen Keiner

State legislatures are also an audience.

Kate McGlooin

What about business? We want to be an audience here as well.

Charles Lee

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Outreach strategies

Larry Charles

If you have a successful case, doing a separate paper on issue would be valuable to be provided to certain groups. Presentations at conferences or releases in the press would be helpful. We need to ID certain individuals from stakeholder groups that wouldn't mind being quoted in press.

Molly Singer

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Kate McGlooin

Have you talked about picking a spectrum of projects?

Katherine Dawes

This really isn't a success story process, but we want to make sure evaluation process is an asset.

Danny Gogal

Ultimate question-do participants support the collaboration effort?

5:25-5:35 p.m.

WRAP-UP & NEXT STEPS -*Katherine Dawes*

-What did we hear today?

-What looks good? What needs more work?

-What would participants like EJ Evaluation Team to provide them with?
(e.g., meeting summary, copy of the revised draft final evaluation strategy, etc.)

Katherine Dawes

We have new ideas for guiding principles.

In terms of the methodology- it's important to have an important clarity of the evaluation. Do a good job of ID'ing audiences for process and results. Focus on collaborative process. How do these interagency collaborations work in a community process.

In terms of choosing projects, our previous number for evaluation may have been too small.

Charles Lee

Conference call clearly a first step. Want to make this truly a transparent process. Determining success will also depend upon you.

Jerry Filbin

Publish minutes of discussion/please make corrections
Do what we've agreed to today

5:35-5:40 p.m. CLOSING -*Charles Lee*

Charles Lee

I just want to thank everyone. Excited about everyone's enthusiasm. The fact that we're in a position today to begin evaluating environmental justice projects is truly a milestone. The key is to be self-critical, and that is never easy. Evaluation is also a constant learning process. We really want the evaluation lead into a national system of learning on environmental justice. And we hope this will enable us to continue improving and promoting the collaborative model.